

ROYAL OAK FIRE DEPARTMENT REGIONALIZATION ANALYSIS

Executive Development

Royal Oak Fire Department Regionalization Analysis

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Abstract

The City of Royal Oak suffered from reduced state revenue sharing coupled with increased costs. This resulted in the elimination of five fire positions thereby reducing the departments overall effectiveness and safety. The problem statement is the Royal Oak Fire Department lacks a study exploring the potential benefits of regionalization between the City of Royal Oak and contiguous cities.

The purpose of this research was to determine if regionalization of fire/rescue and emergency medical services (EMS) could benefit the City of Royal Oak and its contiguous cities utilizing the descriptive research methodology. Procedures included a literature research and interviews from fire and community leaders that sought to identify the issues to be recognized and addressed in a consolidation process.

The results demonstrated that absent political interference, regionalization has proven successful. It is recommended to form a task force to explore the affects of regionalization to Royal Oak and its four contiguous neighbors.

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Introduction

For years fire departments' budgets have been tight. Local taxes and state revenue sharing have been the primary sources of funding for most cities in the State of Michigan. This is the case with the city of Royal Oak. "With local government budgets under the most severe pressure in 20 years, local leaders are taking a fresh look at intergovernmental cooperation" (McGee, 2004, p. 14). The Royal Oak Fire Department, suffering from recent budget cuts, is looking for alternatives to prevent any further cuts that would decrease the current level of services and safety. Regionalization is not a new concept. Los Angeles County Fire Department implemented regionalization in 1949, Metro-Dade Fire Rescue in Florida since 1966 (Johnson; Snook & Wagner, 1997) and locally the city of Ferndale in Oakland County in 1928 (Personal communication R. Schmidt, April 27, 2004). The Royal Oak Fire Department is investigating the merits of regionalization and its effects as a potential alternative to relieve the pressure of fiscal restraints.

The problem statement for the research is the City of Royal Oak is experiencing immediate and projected long term financial short falls. As a result of the city's budget deficit, alternative methods must be identified that will continue to provide the citizens of Royal Oak with the current level of services.

The purpose of this research is to determine if regionalization could benefit the City of Royal Oak and its contiguous cities by evaluating the advantages, disadvantages and obstacles of consolidation and the effects it has

on the life safety of the citizens and the firefighters themselves. Descriptive research methodology will be used to answer the following questions:

1. What effects has regionalization had on the communities it protects?
2. What issues have to be recognized and addressed in regionalizing the fire/rescue and EMS services?
3. Which of these obstacles currently exist in the City of Royal Oak?
4. How does regionalization affect life safety?

Background and Significance

The City of Royal Oak is a suburban community located two miles north of Detroit, Michigan in southeast Oakland County. The City of Royal Oak's population of 60,000 is located in 11.7 square miles. Since 2002, the City of Royal Oak, along with a host of other Michigan cities, has been suffering reductions in state revenue sharing money. "Last year, the city had to reduce the number of its staff positions and cut spending to find an extra \$4 million to cover state revenue-sharing reductions and increased health-care cost", said Finance Director Rick Eva (Gittleman, 2004, p. 7).

In 2003, the City of Royal Oak was forced to make cuts in every departments' budget. In the 2003-2004 fiscal year budget, the fire department suffered a 5% cut in its budget, and a 15% reduction in its EMS budget resulting in the elimination of four firefighter positions. This in turn resulted in a decrease of the daily minimum manning from 18 personnel to 16. The personnel reduction resulted in an engine being taken out of service on a daily basis, thereby

reducing the effectiveness and the safety of the fire department personnel (Personal communication R. Strehlke, February, 17, 2004).

The Royal Oak Fire Department is comprised of career fire service personnel consisting of 5 staff, 2 support staff and 61 line personnel working a three-platoon system. The department is responsible for fire suppression, fire prevention activities that include fire inspections, code enforcement, fire education, and fire investigation. In recent years, there has been an upgrade of emergency medical service within the city of Royal Oak. The upgrade includes basic life support to advanced life support with transport. There has also been the creation of a hazardous material response team. Additionally, a variety of technical rescue disciplines have been initiated. These disciplines include:

- Confined space rescue
- Trench rescue
- Building collapse
- High angle rescue

Currently, there is a great deal of emphasis on rapid intervention training, accountability training, and homeland security issues such as weapons of mass destruction (WMD) response, and chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear and explosives (CBRNE) response. These responsibilities produce a run volume of approximately 5000 incidents per year. In addition to all of these responsibilities basic services must still be delivered expediently in both a safe and effective manner in accordance with State and Federal laws and safety standards.

The current budget and manpower restrictions are affecting service, which in turn affects the ability of fulfilling the department's mission of reducing the effects of fire, medical emergencies, hazardous material incidents, technical rescue emergencies, and disasters. Responding to 5000 incidents per year, coupled with manpower reductions, and time issues, results in reduced training and delayed responses due to the unavailability of apparatus. With the reduction of one engine company and the increased demand placed on the existing companies, the ability to comply with the training requirements mandated by state and federal safety laws and standards in each rescue discipline have diminished. Training standards that must be reduced to less than the minimal standards established by the Michigan Occupational Safety and Health Administration, the Michigan Department of Consumer and Industrial Service/EMS division, NFPA, and other regulating agencies can, overtime, have a devastating effect on the welfare of the employees and their abilities to protect the community.

Manpower and safety issues will become more critical as budgetary constraints continue. Alternative methods must be studied to continue the level of service the citizens have come to expect. In turn, any alternative methods should consider its effect on the safety of the employee providing the service. These services must be provided in a safe and effective manner for all concerned; the citizens we serve and those providing the services.

The Royal Oak Fire Department provides fire prevention services inclusive of fire inspections, fire investigation, plan review, and fire education.

The operations division provides the services; fire suppression, advanced life support including transport, hazardous materials response and technical rescue response. There are three departments contiguous to the Royal Oak Fire Department (ROFD) providing the same level of service to their citizens. These departments are Madison Heights, Ferndale and Hazel Park. These departments are also affected by the reduction in state revenue sharing (personal communication Richard Strehlke, February 11, 2004; R. Donahue, February 13, 2004; R. DeWalt, February 13, 2004; W. LeGault, February, 16, 2004). With the exception of Hazel Park, these departments are also in a consortium with seven additional departments in a mutual aid pact called OAKWAY that serves the local area.

OAKWAY provides assistance, under a set of guidelines, when a member department becomes overtaxed on an incident. The mutual aid pact states that each department, when called upon, must send an apparatus staffed with one officer and three firefighters to the scene of an incident or to a station. Hazel Park, an original member of the mutual aid pact, was removed a few years ago when their daily manning was reduced to less than the requirements of the mutual aid pact. The OAKWAY agreement also created its own hazardous material team consisting of members from each OAKWAY city. The hazardous materials team responds to any OAKWAY city in time of need (Van Sparrentak, 2002).

The Madison Heights Fire Department (MHFD), serving a population of 31,000 in 7.2 square miles, and operating with a current annual budget of \$4.5

million, currently employs a chief, a fire marshal, a fire inspector, one support staff, and 36 line personnel (personal communication R. Donahue, February 13, 2004).

The Ferndale Fire Department (FFD) serves the city of Ferndale and a smaller community, the city of Pleasant Ridge, with a combined population of 25,000 in an area of 4 square miles and operating with an annual budget of \$2.9 million. They employ a chief, a fire inspector, and 32 line personnel (personal communication W. LeGault, February 16, 2004).

The Hazel Park Fire Department (HPFD) serves a population of 19,000 in 2.2 square miles, and operates with an annual budget of \$1.9 million. Hazel Park employs a chief, a fire marshal, and 21 line personnel (personnel communication R. DeWalt, February 13, 2004).

In total these four departments consist of twelve staff positions, three support personnel, 149 fire personnel operating with budgets totaling 15.7 million dollars protecting a population of 134,000 people in 25.1 square miles.

The National Fire Academy-Executive Development course dedicates an entire module to organizational culture and change. The Executive Development pre-course reading refers to the challenges of adaptive changes and taking risk to improve the quality of an organization. Each organization must be able to recognize the need, and through innovative leadership, develop and implement efficient change material (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). This paper will study the need for structural change through consolidation.

The United States Fire Administration (USFA) operational objectives, include reducing the loss of life to firefighters from fire and to promote a comprehensive, multi-hazard risk reduction plan within communities, led by the fire service organization (Executive Fire Officer Program, Operational Policies and Procedures, 2003, p. II-2).

Literature Review

The purpose of the literature review will be to clarify the purpose statement and the related questions, in an attempt to define this research.

In a time period when fire/rescue departments as well as governments are being asked to produce more for less, the trend to consolidate resources in an effort to control spending, reducing the duplication of service, increase efficiency, while continuing to offer a high level of service is becoming more applicable and necessary (Frazier, 1998, p.1).

Regionalization is not just being investigated in the Michigan fire service. Metro Detroit police officers are working to get beyond turf wars to increase delivery of services. Wayne County Executive, Robert Ficano, stated, "Regionalism doesn't mean higher taxes. It means better services for less money" (Manolatos, 2004, ¶ 4).

During the 1990's there were 20 to 30 consolidations that took place throughout the United States. Currently, there are approximately 500 consolidations underway. California State Fire Marshal, Ronny Coleman, stated, " At the current rate of losing 25 departments through consolidation each year,

they figure there will be less than 250 departments in California by the year 2015, down from the approximate 950 they currently have in their state“ (Jensen & Snook, 2000, p. 102).

Through research it was found there are different degrees of consolidation. Some are as simple as a basic mutual aid pact lending assistance on a temporary basis when an agreed partner is overtaxed on an incident. Others are functional consolidations where one or more duties are assigned to another department such as dispatch services, administrative services, or training (McGaughey, 1994).

One example of consolidation can be found in the cities Livermore and Pleasanton, California. The mayors of these two cities claim they have provided both service improvements and economic advantages by moving top officers into specialty roles. *Consolidated Fire Department Delivers Lower Cost, Better Service to Livermore and Pleasanton* [Electronic Version]. The Tualatin Valley Fire & Rescue (TVF&R) is yet another merger. TVF&R, comprised of three individual fire departments that provided the same level of services, were strong and viable in their own right and enjoyed strong administrative staffs along with good political leadership, yet they merged, improving service and lowering the tax burden (Johnson et al., 1997).

Another merger is that of the Toronto Fire Services. On January 1, 1998, the City of Toronto Act was implemented. The government of the Province of Ontario passed this legislation. This act reduced duplication of efforts and

developed a more efficient public service. They merged six municipalities into one known as the Toronto Fire Services (Sells, 1999).

Effects of regionalization

The majority of research reveals many advantages to regionalization. More efficient uses of resources and eliminating duplication of high capital costs, such as ladder trucks and engines, greater staff flexibility, less equipment needs, and shorter response times (Thomas, 1994). Other authors add to these advantages citing improved insurance ratings lowering consumer's insurance premiums, and elimination of duplication of staff positions and dispatch centers. Regionalization provides a larger tax base and reduces hiring cost. It also provides more efficient utilization of personnel. Regionalization increases service levels for the same dollar output (Johnson et al., 1997; McCormick 2000). Tax reductions are also a by-product of regionalization. The TVF&R merger resulted in a tax reduction of 50% from 1988 to 1997. Richard Hamm, retired Chief of Multnomah County, Oregon states, " I think the consolidations and mergers we carried out gave our community a lot better fire protection and we reduced costs. I think it was the best thing that ever happened to Mutnomah County (Johnson et al., 1997, p. 38).

McCormick (2000) and Johnson et al. (1997) list numerous tangible advantages to a consolidation such as:

- Central dispatch facilities
- Lower apparatus replacement cost

- Enhanced career opportunities
- Joint training and testing facilities
- Staff specialization, better use of staff's talents.
- Insurance Service Office (ISO) rating improvements: saving homeowners insurance cost.
- Volume purchasing; reducing cost
- Faster response times; closest apparatus responds regardless of boundaries.
- More efficient allocation of personnel
- More effective utilization of personnel
- Increased service levels for same dollar output
- Elimination of duplications; cost savings
- Larger tax base
- Training; Firefighters trained consistently by one organization provides a more unified effort at incidents. Contrast to mutual aid companies acting independently of each other on the fireground.
- Hiring; Reduced personnel cost for hiring through elimination of redundancy

In the article, "Funding Fire Protection, part 2" (1994) a roundtable discussion took place where multiple authors opine on regionalization issues. Bob Simpson, a member of Anaheim (California) City Council, past deputy chief of Los Angeles County Fire Department, chief of Anaheim, deputy city manager and then city manager opines, regionalization provides the greatest potential for cost savings and provides a far better level of service. Chief R. Bruegman, being

through three such consolidations personally, and past chief of Bridgeport, Connecticut Gerald F. Grover are of the same opinion.

Issues to be recognized and addressed

The research did not identify any tangible disadvantage in consolidating. However, in “Funding Fire Protection, part 2” (1994), Mr. H. Stofer, from the board of the National Association of Towns and Townships and board chairman of the Indiana Volunteer Firemens’ Association, states that he doesn’t feel that consolidation is the answer to cost problems. He feels that just because you make it big doesn’t make it less expensive. He goes on to report that he feels it does not lower costs and results in longer response times (Funding Fire Protection, part 2”, 1994).

Many authors list advantages of regionalization. They also warn of obstacles to be overcome before any successful merger can take place.

Grover, Bruegman and Simpson commented that the biggest obstacles to regionalization are chief officers and turf battles. Grover goes on to state, “ These can be overcome by proper research and marketing, advertising and selling techniques that simply amount to clear and objective facts to support the argument of savings” (Funding Fire Protection, part 2”, 1994 p. 42).

In “Making the Pieces Fit” (Johnson et al., 1997), nineteen case studies are reviewed of consolidations and consolidation efforts. Out of the nineteen case studies, nine resulted in mergers and seven more resulted in some form of joint contract or consolidation of services. Another city consolidated

administrative duties, which shortly thereafter fell apart due to political issues. Two other cities chose not to consolidate; one due to politics and the other; due to challenges that surfaced from the different level of services the departments delivered.

Most failures are the result of some form of personal sabotage. For this reason, it is important to proceed cautiously and objectively. The article goes on to say “ Ironically, success has less to do with the strength of a management team than with an alliance among management, labor, and policy-makers” (Jensen & Snook, 2000, p. 105).

In any consolidation effort, it is extremely important, from a political standpoint, that all jurisdictions be given plenty of opportunity for input. Labor unions must also be dealt with fairly (McCormick, 2000).

Affects on life safety

As communities grew, the demand for specialized services, as well as service levels in general, grew with them. Legislative and administrative bodies at the state and federal levels passed mandates that taxed the providers’ ability to meet fiscal safety, legal and service obligations. All the while, the threat of major disasters limited most providers’ ability to meet the demands of a conflagration without multi-agency cooperation (Jensen & Snook, 2000, p. 102).

Currently MHFD, HPFD, and FFD respond to fire incidents without the minimum manpower requirements outlined by the National Fire Protection

Association (NFPA) standard 1710. ROFD drops below those minimums if one piece of apparatus is out of service (personal communication Richard Strehlke, February 11, 2004; R. Donahue, February 13, 2004; R. DeWalt, February 13, 2004; W. LeGault, February, 16, 2004). NFPA 1710 is the standard for fire suppression and emergency medical operations. This standard sets requirements for delivery of services, response capabilities and incident management. Essentially, NFPA 1710 creates a benchmark for measuring career fire departments performance and staffing levels. The NFPA standard requires a minimum of 14 personnel as the first- alarm primary attack assignment (Jones, 2001).

NFPA 1710; 5.2.3.2.2 states; The initial full alarm assignment shall provide for the following:

- (1) Establishment of incident command outside the hazard area for the overall coordination and direction of the initial full alarm assignment. A minimum of one individual shall be dedicated to this task.
- (2) Establishment of an uninterrupted water supply of a minimum of 400 gallons per minute (gpm) for 30 minutes. Supply lines shall be maintained by an operator who shall ensure uninterrupted water flow application.
- (3) Establishment of an effective water flow application rate of 300 gpm from two handlines, each of which shall have a minimum of

100gpm. Attack and back up lines shall be operated by a minimum of two personnel each to effectively and safely maintain the line.

- (4) Provision of one support person for each attack and back up line deployed to provide hydrant hook up and to assist in line lay, utility control and forcible entry.
- (5) A minimum of one victim search and rescue team shall be a part of the initial full alarm assignment. Each search and rescue team shall consist of a minimum of two personnel.
- (6) A minimum of one ventilation team shall be part of the initial full alarm assignment. Each ventilation team shall consist of two personnel.
- (7) If an aerial device is used in operations, one person shall function as an aerial operator who shall maintain primary control of the aerial device at all times.
- (8) Establishment of an Initial Rapid Intervention Crew (IRIC) that shall consist of a minimum of two properly equipped and trained personnel (NFPA, 2001).

Michigan's Occupational Safety and Health Act, Part 74. Fire

Fighting, Rule 408.17411 Duties of employer States: An employer is required to provide training to an employee commensurate with those duties and functions that the employee is expected to perform. Such training shall be provided before the employee is permitted to perform emergency operations (p. 2).

The literature review found almost all of the authors were in agreement that regionalization/consolidation is feasible and provides a cost-effective alternative for improving service and safety for the citizens and firefighters alike. However, there are obstacles that need to be overcome while working through the process. These obstacles include: autonomy issues, labor contracts, and possible turf wars.

Procedures

Descriptive research methodology was employed for this project. The purpose of this research is to determine the feasibility of regionalizing the four contiguous fire departments in order to provide the level of service the citizens have come to expect.

This paper will focus on an adaptive change and challenge the paradigm of the organizational structure. For this paper, research will concentrate on consolidations or mergers where one department takes over the services of another, or two or more departments merge with a form of joint powers governing board for administrative and financial concerns.

The first step in the research process was taken at the National Fire Academy's Learning Resource Center in Emmitsburg, Maryland. A literature review was conducted in which a card catalog search revealed multiple articles on regionalization and consolidation in periodicals and Executive Fire Officer (EFO) papers. The Internet, local newspapers and journals were also utilized for the literature review.

Interviews

The Literature review was used to formulate the foundation of the interview process. Appointments were made to interview those who would be the most effected by regionalization; the employees, the administrators, and those that currently govern. Interviews sought to study if a structural change would be feasible to the four cities and if so, identify what obstacles may lie ahead. More specifically, could the chiefs, the unions, and the city fathers see advantages to consolidation and would they support continued efforts in regionalization? Existing itineraries limited the number of interviews to eleven. The fire chief from each of the four departments was interviewed, two of the labor union presidents, three city managers, and two city commissioners to answer the questions in Appendix A and Appendix B.

The interviews with the chiefs would cover statistical information to lay a foundation. They would be asked for the number of square miles protected, population, and number of employees.

The first interview was with the Chief of the Royal Oak Fire Department, Richard Strehlke. The interview took place at 9:00a.m. on Wednesday, February 11, 2004.

Chief Richard Donahue of the Madison Heights Fire Department was interviewed next. Chief Donahue oversees fire and rescue services for 7.2 square miles. Chief Donahue's interview was conducted on February 13, 2004

at 9:30 a.m. The interview of Chief Donahue was followed by an interview with the chief of the Hazel Park Fire Department, Ray DeWalt.

The last to be interviewed was Chief William LeGault of the Ferndale Fire Department. This interview took place on February 16, 2003 at 9:30 a.m. Chief LeGault administers fire and rescue services to both Ferndale and the City of Pleasant Ridge for a total of 4 square miles of coverage. Ferndale Firefighters union president Brian Batten was interviewed immediately after Chief LeGault.

The president of the Royal Oak Professional Firefighters Local 431, firefighter Ben Upton, was interviewed on Thursday February 12, 2004 at 9:30 a.m. Mr. Upton represents the 65 employees of the department with the exception of the chief.

City commissioners and city managers deal with the current budget crisis on a day-to-day basis seeking avenues to reduce cost while providing essential city services to the citizens at an acceptable level. These interviews were sought to obtain advantages and disadvantages, but also to see if the political climate is right for such an undertaking and to see what political obstacles would have to be overcome.

An interview was set with The City of Royal Oak City Manager, Lawrence Doyle in his office on February 17, 2004. The interview began at 2:15 p.m. Mr. Doyle was familiar with the concept and provided worthy insight. Next, city commissioners Michael Andrezczak and Marie Donigan were interviewed on February 20, 2004 at 11:10 a.m. and on March 3, 2004, respectively.

Interviews were also conducted with the City of Hazel Park City Manager, Ed Klobucher, and the City of Madison Heights City Manger, John Austin. These interviews were conducted in their perspective offices. Mr. Klobucher was interviewed on Friday, March 19, 2004 and Mr. Austin on Monday March 22, 2004.

Limitations

This study of consolidation is limited to identifying the advantages and obstacles that are associated to a regionalization process. This research is being offered to determine if consolidation would benefit the City of Royal Oak and if an in-depth study of effects and legal aspects would be justifiable by a task force in pursuing a regionalization process. It is assumed that published authors and interviewees are considered experts. A dominant limitation for this research is the six-month time constriction place on this research. The small population group in the interview process also limits the results.

Definitions

Automatic aid: aid rendered automatically without a specific request.

CBRNE: chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, explosive

EMS: emergency medical services.

FFD: Ferndale Fire Department.

Functional consolidation: consolidation of functional disciplines such as dispatch or training.

gpm: gallons per minute.

HPFD: Hazel Park Fire Department.

IRIC: Initial rapid intervention crew.

USFA: United States Fire Administration.

ISO: Insurance Service Office.

Merger: boundaries dropped, personnel intermixed, a new name and all functions performed by the one department.

MHFD: Madison Heights Fire Department.

Mutual Aid: an alliance created by agreement to a specific territory, situation or response.

NFPA: National Fire Protection Association

OAKWAY: A mutual aid group consisting of nine fire departments; Birmingham, Bloomfield Township, Ferndale, Madison Heights, Pontiac, Royal Oak, Southfield, Waterford, West Bloomfield providing services to 13 communities; Birmingham, Bloomfield Township, Ferndale, Madison Heights, Pontiac, Royal Oak, Southfield, Waterford, West Bloomfield, Pleasant Ridge, Keego Harbor, Sylvan Lake, and Orchard Lake.

ROFD: Royal Oak Fire Department.

TVF&R: Tualatin Valley Fire & Rescue

WMD: weapons of mass destruction

Results

Eleven interviews were conducted; the fire chief of each jurisdiction, two union representatives, three city managers, and two city commissioners. The

interview questions in Appendix A & B were similar with additional questions to the chiefs for providing statistical information. The statistical information is in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Statistics of the four jurisdictions

	Square miles	Population	Operating Budget	Staff Personnel	Line Personnel	Support Personnel
ROFD	11.7	60k	6.0 MIL	5	62	2
MHFD	7.2	31K	4.5 MIL	3	36	1
FFD	4	24K	3.3 MIL	2	30	1
HPFD	2.2	19K	1.9 MIL	2	21	0
TOTALS	25.1	134K	15.7 MIL	12	149	4

The first question asked of all interviewees was, What advantages are there to consolidating the Royal Oak, Madison Heights, Hazel Park, and Ferndale Fire Departments, if any?

Increased manpower to improve firefighter safety was identified by one hundred percent (4 of 4) of the chiefs as an advantage of consolidating. Seventy Five percent (3 of 4) of the chiefs listed less cost for capital improvements as an advantage. Consolidation would eliminate duplication of high capital cost such as ladder trucks, or, every city would not need multiple reserve engines. Twenty

five percent (1 of 4) of the chiefs listed the following as advantages: Improved response coverage, specialize administration and clerical positions, shared expenses, and improvement of special operation teams.

Both union presidents identified firefighter safety as the greatest advantage, citing the ability to follow MIOSHA requirements. One hundred percent (2 of 2) of the union presidents also identified that automatic aid and better training opportunities were also as great advantages to regionalization. Improved inspection services, improved homeowner insurance ratings and improved service delivery were mentioned by one hundred percent (2 of 2) of the labor representatives.

The commissioners and city managers echoed many of the same sentiments. Eighty percent (4 of 5) of the administrators cited savings in capital expenditures as an advantage along with improvements in services such as automatic aid, which reduces response times. Forty percent (2 of 5) identified reductions in shared resources such as dispatch services. Twenty percent (1 of 5) identified an improvement in insurance ratings, reduction in personnel, and elimination in duplication of services as advantages.

The next question asked was, What disadvantages would there be to a regionalization plan?

The fire chiefs did not see many disadvantages to merging. Although twenty five percent (1 of 4) of them said it would result in increased response times for those in proximity to a station that may be closed. Also (1 of 4) fire chiefs felt there would be some loss of control in a regionalization process.

The labor representatives identified disadvantages they felt would affect their membership. Fifty percent (1 of 2) of the labor representatives cited two – tier contracts, loss promotional opportunities, loss of control, and closing of stations resulting in loss of jobs as the major disadvantages.

Twenty percent (1 of 5) of the administrators said there is no disadvantage to consolidation. Forty percent (2 of 5) of the administrators said loss of control would be a disadvantage and twenty percent (1 of 5) said that it would be arduous to get out of, if the need arose, once a consolidation took place. A reduction in fire stations was felt as a disadvantage from twenty percent (1 of 5) of the administrators.

In preparation for a successful regionalization, the interviewees were asked: “What obstacles do you think would need to be overcome in order to develop a successful regionalization plan?”

Union contract issues to include rank differentials, pay rates, pension issues, etc. were identified as an obstacle to be overcome by one hundred percent (4 of 4) of the fire chiefs. Fifty percent (2 of 4) of the chiefs recognized politics and taxation issues as obstacles to a merger. Twenty five percent (1 of 4) of the chiefs also felt governance issues would need to be overcome along with loss of identity, and autonomy issues.

One hundred percent (2 of 2) of the union representatives felt labor contract issues including manpower guarantees and rank structure would need to be dealt with along with autonomy issues.

Politics, loss of identity, and autonomy issues were identified as obstacles by forty percent (2 of 5) of the administrators. They identified loss of identity with concern for the public and for the firefighters. Twenty percent (1 of 5) of the administrators also mentioned union issues, employee satisfaction, instituting a new hierarchy, a taxing authority, and a new governing authority as obstacles to be overcome in order for a successful merger to take place.

Each interviewee was also asked if they felt some form of consolidation would benefit their community. One hundred percent (11 of 11) answered yes. This was then followed-up by a question asking what degree of consolidation would be most beneficial. Again, one hundred percent (11 of 11) of them; every chief, union representative, city manager and commissioner answered a full merger would best satisfy the need, and each interviewee also agreed to participate in a study.

The effects of regionalization on other communities have resulted in reduced tax rates, increases the level of service to the public, and lower cost of doing business by eliminating duplication efforts in apparatus, positions, and services.

The research lacked evidence of any concrete disadvantage of regionalization other than it could be very difficult to get out of an agreement once entered into (personal communication J. Austin, March 19, 2004).

There were many obstacles to a successful merger identified. Politics, at every level, is the front-runner of concerns by the chiefs, the unions, the administrators, and the governing body. Research and interviews suggest that

with open lines of communication and allowing everyone to have their say, the egos and turf wars can be kept to a minimum and overcome (Funding Fire Protection, part 2", 1994).

The labor unions also must be dealt with fairly (McCormick, 2000). Regionalization cannot be a disguise for a reduction in workforce. If it is being utilized to reduce the workforce, it is doomed for failure (Rule, 1992).

The response to the research question, "How does regionalization effect life safety?" was supported by the laws and standards set forth by MIOSHA and NFPA stating an increased number in manpower, on any incident, provides increased safety for the firefighters. "Research shows putting a third firefighter on an engine reduces injuries by 60%, and putting a fourth firefighter on an engine increases safety an additional 40% over the three" (personal communication with B. Upton March 25, 2004).

Although half of the chiefs thought one major obstacle to regionalization would be the labor unions, the union presidents embraced the idea.

Royal Oak City Commissioner, Marie Donigan, in her interview listed multiple advantages to regionalization. She feels there is a savings in numbers while you enjoy consistency of service, "What benefits our neighbors benefits us." And she opined that our needs are regional these days and that the purpose of a merger should be to provide a better service, not to save money." Commissioner Donigan also voiced her concern of "creating a monster" and that it could be difficult to get out if it did not suit everybody's needs. Obstacles to be overcome are a taxing authority, a fire governance committee, and keeping

politicians on the same page, during the process, in light of the fact that there are changes every two years. She was also concerned about legal issues and stated that attorneys need to be involved from the start. A concluding comment by Commissioner Donigan was, "Theoretically it is a great idea but political realities could be daunting!"

In the interview with Royal Oak City Manager Lawrence Doyle, he stated that he felt that regionalization is a good idea and we will likely see more of it in the future. He sighted autonomy issues as possible concerns. He voiced concern about possible loss of identity, citing an issue facing a neighboring city. The neighboring city might possibly lose their local police force due to budgetary constraints and the concerns the residents have if the county sheriff takes over. The residents feel they are losing "their police force". He also mentioned how numerous other cities in the county use the same county sheriffs and would not have it any other way.

Royal Oak City Commissioner, Michael Andreczak, in his interview stated all cost saving ideas need to be seriously looked at and that it forces one to think more creatively. He is agreeable to consolidating administration, training, and equipment, and would support a full merger if there were buy-in from the labor unions. He did not feel there would be a buy-in problem from the public because it improves their safety. Mr. Andreczak would be opposed to the elimination of any firehouses as he feels they provide a sense of community and security for those around them. He also opposes any reductions in manpower.

“ It’s about time a merger takes place!” stated City Manger of Hazel Park, Edward Klobucher. Mr. Klobucher commented on how municipal finance in Michigan is really broken and that merging the four departments would allow the department to be, “big enough to take advantage of the economies of scale, yet be small enough to provide excellent service.” Mr. Klobucher feels that savings would be immediate. His principle concern was for the possible loss of community identity that could possibly take place. Other obstacles to overcome would be dealing with the following questions:

- How will it be governed?
- How will it be funded?
- Who works for whom?

He also felt these obstacles could ultimately be worked out knowing that overall the citizens are getting a better service.

In the interview with the city manager of Madison Heights, John Austin, he mentioned that although he is in favor of regionalization, their city’s experience with a waste consortium is an example in how regionalization does not always work and that you need to safeguard against what could happen. Mr. Austin felt the aforementioned communities are a good fit due to size and comparative services. Along with cost savings, he felt the communities could benefit from each other’s expertise in specialized areas. Mr. Austin did suggest there may be animosity between the unions that will need to be dealt with, and the citizens may feel a loss of identity; however he feels these issues could be overcome. One

other obstacle mentioned is the loss of control. Due to a shared service the cities may feel that the loss of control could be an issue.

Mr. Austin pointed out that a full merger would best serve the four departments and that he would be willing to present a study to his council. He stated, "We don't have the luxury to work on our own anymore."

Discussion

The literature reviewed along with the information gained from the interviews overwhelmingly identified key advantages to a consolidated department. The research only identified one tangible disadvantage to consolidation and that is the arduous task of getting out of a merger, should the need arise.

Literature sighted multiple successful mergers and the benefits they are realizing. Improved services and delivery of those services are two of these advantages (Johnson et al., 1997; McCormick, 2000).

Research also proved that past mergers were also successful in lowering cost. Capital spending costs are reduced through a reduction in the number of needed reserve engines in relation to front line engines, and a reduction in the needed number of ladder trucks. There are also cost savings in fire manager positions. There is need for only one fire chief. The other chief positions would be more effectively utilized in staff specialization positions; training officer, operations chief, administration chief, etc. (McCormick, 2000). Research also identified tax savings as much as 50% (Jensen & Snook, 2000).

The interviewees agreed with these findings sighting many of the same advantages as the literature. An issue that was identified by the interviews but surprisingly was not in the literature was firefighter safety. The literature sighted automatic aid (Carter, 2000) as an advantage but the literature lacked tangible evidence of improved firefighter safety from the advantage of increased personnel. One hundred percent (6 of 6) of the fire chiefs and labor representatives identified firefighter safety as an advantage to a merger. Regionalization can have an explicit effect on life safety. It will allow firefighters the ability to adhere to state and federal safety laws and standards and be operationally more effective due to increased manpower. This author feels firefighter safety is the primary advantage to a merger and the other advantages are secondary, although important as well.

The research indicates the onerous segment of a successful merger as the political obstacles to be overcome. Grover, Bruegman and Simpson sight chief officers and turf battles as major obstacles. Grover goes on to state, “These can be overcome by proper research and marketing, advertising and selling techniques that simply amount to clear and objective facts to support the argument of savings” (Funding Fire Protection, part 2”, 1994. p. 42).

The construction of an alliance agreement does not happen overnight. An alliance agreement takes a concentrated effort on all sides to identify and establish the business for the alliance partners to operate.

Preparation is critical to the success or failure of any alliance (Kuglin, 2002).

The study results equally compare to the literature reviewed. The research also indicates that regionalization plans have been successful throughout the nation and there is no reason that a merger amongst Royal Oak, Madison Heights, Hazel Park and Ferndale would be any less successful. It was surprising to me that in all the research there was not any evidence stating consolidations would not work operationally. All obstacles were due to politics or sabotage from an individual or group. With open lines of communication and allowing all stakeholders to have their say, the difficulties of egos and turf wars can be overcome. The benefits far outweigh any obstacle that may need to be overcome in the process. Throughout the interviews I expected to hear one of the interviewees or a group of interviewees deny regionalization as a viable entity. Instead, I became more excited as each person interviewed felt the timing was right and that each found advantages in a merger. I feel each facet would be satisfied; the cities would get the cost saving they are looking for, the chiefs and labor unions would get the manpower they need to provide a high level of service in a safe and effective manner, and the citizens would receive an increased level of service.

Treating adaptive challenges as technical problems is identified as one of the most common leadership failures (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). If we tackle the problem of budget reductions, increased demands, manpower and safety as an organizational structural change, as an adaptive challenge, not a technical one, a high level of service may be delivered in a safe and effective manner for all concerned; the citizens we serve and the firefighters providing the services.

Regionalization eliminates redundancy, reduces cost, reduces insurance premiums, provides improved services, and increases safety. Realistically the days of getting more for less are over (McCormick, 2000; Johnson et al., 1997).

The issue here is quite simple. There are less and less of us being asked to do more and more emergency (and non-emergency) work. We learned to play well in school together, but now we must play well together in life. Because as John Donne noted more than 370 years ago, "No man (person, fire department, EMS unit) is an island ..." Let's put away the boats, forget about the islands and become a full part of the emergency service team in our area. The clock is ticking away until the next serious incident invades your community. (Carter, 2000, p.4)

Recommendations

The following recommendations have basis in the analysis of this research. The reasoning used had foundation in the data collected, through the literature review, and the interview process.

Serious considerations should be given to consolidation of the fire based services currently provided by the City of Royal Oak, Madison Heights, Hazel Park, and Ferndale. A merger of these four fire agencies into one operational unit, would be beneficial to all interested parties. Providing the level of services each community experienced prior to recent cutbacks would be maintained.

These four departments must not allow the level of services they currently provide to be reduced any further. During this difficult financial time, structural

change is an opportunity to improve service and safety standards. It is recommended that the City of Royal Oak introduce a regionalization proposal to the four cities outlining the creation of an executive committee comprised of representatives from each municipality with representation in the following areas: citys' commissioners, administrators, fire mangers, union representatives and citizens.

The research indicated that each party involved in the restructuring process has differing needs that must be addressed. It is recommended that an executive committee form work groups to research this process. Members of this committee may include high-ranking officials in fire and local government, and/or a consulting firm. Their mission will be to develop a plan for the recommended consolidation. This plan will be the foundation for consolidation process.

Once the foundation or process for change has been established, focus groups should be established to address each area within the organization. Target groups would include facilities, labor and human resource issues, training, suppression, operational procedures, prevention, apparatus, finance, EMS, and intergovernmental council. Each focus group will have a set time line for a study completion. Each group should include decision-makers from administration, labor, and elected officials.

A strong recommendation would include the appointment of a public information officer. This person would be used to properly disseminate information to each target audience, the media, and any interested persons

within each community. A central point for information will be necessary in a project of this size.

The final recommendation would be to reestablish the original executive group, or one similar, to evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of the operational changes throughout the consolidation process. This group should continually evaluate the consolidation over the next three years.

“Whether you plan for it, or hide from it, the future will occur. Better to have a hand in choosing the road your fire department will have to travel anyway.” (Carter, 1995 p. 28).

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Appendix A

Interview Questions for Fire Department Chiefs

1. What is your department's operating budget?
2. How many staff positions are there and what are their job titles?
3. How many support personnel do you employ and what are their titles?
4. How many line personnel are there?
5. How many square miles does your department protect?
6. What is the population of your jurisdiction?
7. Would some level of consolidation be beneficial to your community?
8. What advantages, if any, do you see with Royal Oak, Madison Heights, Hazel Park, and Ferndale consolidating their fire departments?
9. What disadvantages do you see, if any, in consolidating with one or more departments?
10. What major obstacles do you feel would need to be overcome for a successful merger or consolidation?
11. What level of consolidation do you feel would benefit your department?
12. Would you be a willing participant in a consolidation study?

Appendix B

Interview Questions

1. Would some level of consolidation be beneficial to your community?
2. What advantages, if any, do you see with Royal Oak, Madison Heights, Hazel Park, and Ferndale consolidating their fire departments?
3. What disadvantages do you see, if any, in consolidating with one or more departments?
4. What major obstacles do you feel would need to be overcome for a successful merger or consolidation?
5. What level of consolidation do you feel would benefit your department?
6. Would you be a willing participant in a consolidation study?